

How U.S. General Saved Saigon

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BY MALCOLM W. BROWNE

SAIGON (AP)—In the last six months Saigon has been spared twice from the destruction of aerial bombing and all-out civil war.

Both times attempted coups could easily have ended with the destruction of a city of nearly 2,000,000 residents and the complete disruption of war efforts against the Viet Cong.

Both times disaster was headed off largely by an affable, middle-aged American fighter pilot with an exceptional flair for diplomacy and making friends.

He is Brig. Gen. Robert R. Rowland, 47, senior adviser to the Vietnamese air force.

Rowland is known throughout the Vietnamese general staff as a peacemaker and friend. To Brig. Gen. Nguyen Cao, Ky, commander of the Vietnamese air force, Rowland is "my best friend."

ON SEPT. 13, a strong rebel force under the command of Brig. Gen. Lam Van Phat rolled into Saigon, seizing all of the capital but the airport. Ky, who remained loyal to the government, threatened to blast the rebels and Saigon.

Delicate diplomatic maneuvers by Rowland prevented



GEN. NGUYEN CAO KY
His ultimatum . . .

the bombing of Saigon. Rowland also contributed to the soothing of tempers that led to the collapse of the coup.

He worked around the clock with Vietnamese officers, persuading them gently but firmly not to start shooting at each other.

IT HAPPENED again Feb. 19, with almost exactly the same cast. This time both the rebels and loyalists were spoiling for battle and the rebels had seized Saigon airport. Ky and most of his pilots escaped to Bien Hoa airport 12 miles away and were out for blood.

The rebels under Phat and Col. Pham Ngoc Thao occupied Saigon airport with tanks. Virtual hostages inside the airport compound were some 6,000 American servicemen and a vital hub of all anti-Communist air activity in the nation.

Ky threatened to bomb Saigon airport and rebel strongpoints in the city at 5:30 p.m. if the rebels did not capitulate. Rowland was inside the rebel-held airport and began talking.

KNOWING the professional capability of the Vietnamese air force, "he said" I was worried when I heard that Ky was at Bien Hoa air base threatening a strike on Saigon airport.

"Phat had seized Ky's Saigon headquarters and was holding three of Ky's officers hostage. I felt this was a direct affront to Ky as air force commander and understood his anger.

"I had been sitting with



GEN. ROBERT ROWLAND
. . . worried him plenty.

Phat for three hours talking to Ky by radio. I knew that if one of Ky's fighters then buzzing the airport dropped one bomb the whole American and Vietnamese joint effort would have gone down the drain.

"And that's what I told Ky.